

# Special Forest Fire Reprint Issue

Articles and Photographs  
Reprinted from May 10, 17,  
24, and 31st Issues of the  
Crawford Co. Avalanche

Crawford  
County

Avalanche

\$1

## Fire Destroys At Least 50 Homes

Reprinted from May 10th issue

By Jon Thompson and Irene Pettyjohn

The most expensive forest fire in Crawford County's history burned out of control from 3:58 p.m. Tuesday, May 8, until about 11 p.m. when most of the blaze was contained.

Firefighters estimated more than 50 houses burned to the ground in an area from Thendara Rd. northeast to Stephan Bridge Rd., Shaw Rd., Pine Rd., and North Down River Rd., to Bald Hill Rd. Damages were initially estimated at \$2.4 million by county equalization director Bill Borchers. At 9:55 p.m. Governor Blanchard declared it a disaster area.

DNR firefighter Duane Brooks said the fire produced more monetary loss than the large Mack Lake fire a couple years ago. "It was the scariest fire I've ever been in," said Beaver Creek Fire Chief Ed Holtcamp. "It was the most houses I've ever seen burn in my 27 years of firefighting."

Strong winds pushed the blaze northeast quickly from Pappy's Trail, where the fire started.

"This was the worst fire I've fought because of the wind," said Howard Taylor, a firefighter with the DNR crew for 15 years.

"In all the 37 years I've been around house fires in Grayling, I saw more houses burn today than all the other years combined," said Sheriff Harold Hatfield.

Only two persons were listed as injured from the fire — two firefighters — as of midnight Tuesday. DNR Conservation officers, Sheriff deputies, and other law enforcement personnel evacuated 300-400 persons from the fire area.

Among some of the homes that were reported as destroyed or close to the fire's path were Carl Yost's, Jay Stephan's, Del Sheldon's, Nancy and David Lemmen's, Dick Wakeley's, Joe Kuck's, and RaxAnn Adam's.

Officer Dean Goss, who is also the assistant fire chief for the Grayling City and Township Fire Dept., said the destruction was unbelievable.

"I saw 14 houses burning in a single block in the Shaw Park area," he said. Goss said many homes on Pine Road and both sides of North Down River Road were lost. He said the first house that burned was on Pappy's Trail.

"There is no way to take an accurate count of the homes and cabins burned," stated Goss. "We evacuated about 300 people."

The fire path jumped around. One house on Stephan Bridge Rd. did not burn while houses on each side burned. Garages and outbuildings burned at Mike and Beth Wieland's but their house did not burn. That happened in several places.

Police suspect the blaze started near Pappy's Trail and a person burning brush was the cause.

While this major fire was burning, other fires were blazing in the county Tuesday afternoon. A fire in Indian Glen's destroyed homes there. Three small fires were reported near Arrowhead Rd.

Every township fire department in the county was called to fight the fires and Kalkaska County put out the Arrowhead Rd. fires. The DNR called in other area units and Camp Grayling units also assisted.

The strong gusting winds did not die down until some rain mercifully swept through the area about 8:30 p.m. But before the winds died down, they shifted from the southwest and the path of the fire went back to some areas it had missed before and more houses were lost.

Problems firefighters ran into were crown fires (fires racing among the tops of trees), power lines falling, and propane tanks exploding. About 1,400 Top of Michigan customers lost power because of downed lines.

Beth Wieland was at her home trying to gather up a few items before the fire came.

"It came down the power line and it sounded like a train coming," she said. "The heat and smoke were so bad we had to leave."

Police had trouble evacuating people. Some were refusing to leave the danger area. Other people were causing problems at the roadblocks and one man was arrested for carrying a weapon. As the firefighters began getting a handle on the blaze, reports of people looting in the evacuated areas started coming into the central dispatch office at the sheriff's dept.

People throughout Grayling pulled together during the tragedy. Motels offered lodging; restaurants and grocery stores offered food and items to firefighters and evacuated people. Camp Grayling opened its doors to the evacuated people for the night.

As the Crawford County Avalanche went to press early

**"I saw 14 houses burning in a single block in the Shaw Park area."**

**--firefighter Dean Goss**

Wednesday morning, DNR firefighters were planning on meeting at the Command Center set up at Duane LaMotte's Down River Pines store at the intersection of M-72 East and Stephan Bridge Rd. early Wednesday morning for the next step. Firefighters were concerned another dry, windy day would start up smoldering fires.

## Rain Helped Knock Down Fire

By Irene Pettyjohn

Mother Nature's rain and cooler temperatures were extremely helpful in extinguishing the fires, said Duane Brooks, DNR fire officer.

"If the rains had not come and the winds died down as they did," he said, "the fire would have probably burned through the night and taken off and run all day the next day."

Brooks described the fire as "extremely dangerous." High winds fanned the flames moving the fire approximately nine miles in about 4 1/2 hours. He said there were so many people involved in evacuating the area and the fire was spreading so fast, the chance of someone getting trapped in the fire was a

**"Some people refused to move," said Duane Brooks "and we can't make them leave. All we can do is warn them, give them the facts."**

very real possibility.

"Some people refused to move," he said, "and we can't make them leave. All we can do is warn them, give them the facts."

Grayling City and Township assistant fire chief Dean Goss said the intense heat and speed of the fire forced his firemen to get themselves and their equipment out of the Pappy's Trail area, abandoning some of the homes there. He said there were times when it was all they could do to stay ahead of the fire.

Brooks said the heat from any forest fire is tremendous. The energy released can create a full size tornado. He said this forest fire burned so intensely that it disintegrated the structures in its path, leaving only ash, cement work and scrap metal. Tuesday's fire was a crown fire and Brooks said there is no technology known to fight a crown fire.

The second week in May is an historic week for forest fires in northern Michigan. On May 8, 1968, fires in Beaver Creek and South Branch townships burned over 6,000 acres. On May 10, 1975, 3,598 acres burned in the Bald Hill area and an additional 2,802 acres burned on North Down River Road. More than 25,000 acres were destroyed in the Mack Lake, Mio, fire on May 5, 1980, and 1,931 acres were lost in Ogemaw

**"If the rains had not come and the winds died down as they did ... the fire would have probably burned through the night and taken off and run all day the next day."**

County during the Damon Fire on May 9, 1987.

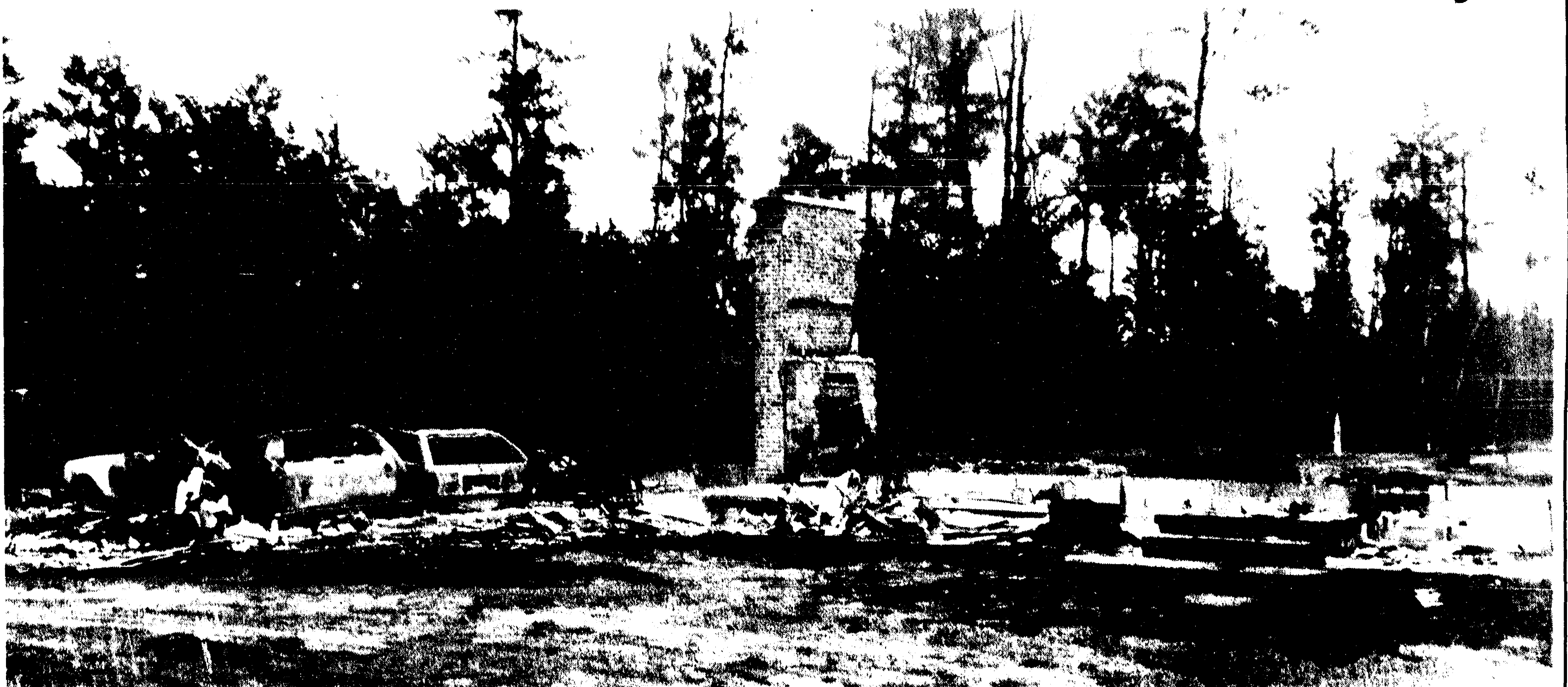
Brooks said the burning index on Tuesday afternoon was at 17.

"That's about as bad as it gets," he said.

In an effort to save time should a fire be reported, Brooks had equipment standing by at Wakeley Bridge and M-72 East and at McMasters Bridge and North Down River Road. Even with these precautions, he said they lost time getting to the South Branch fire because the equipment at McMasters Bridge and North Down River roads had to double back to Wakeley Bridge Road because the equipment was too heavy for the three ton load limit on McMasters Bridge.

Reprinted from May 17th issue

## "The Most Destructive Fire in Crawford County"

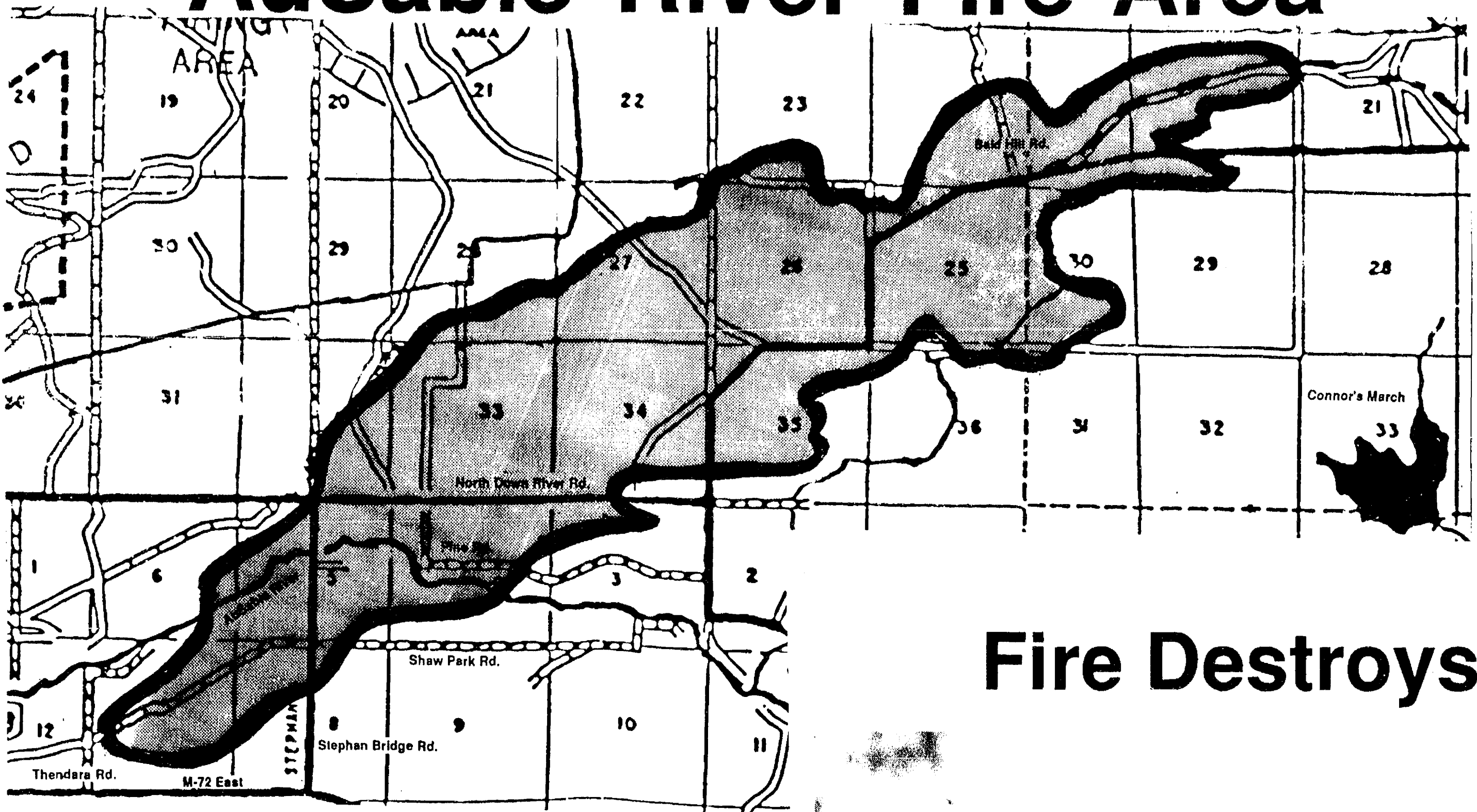


**SMOKING RUBBLE**--The remains of this home on Pappy's Trail shows the destruction of Tuesday's fire. It also shows how the fire jumped around taking and leaving property. The fire destroyed the house and both cars, but left the clothes lines behind the house.

Photo by Jon Thompson

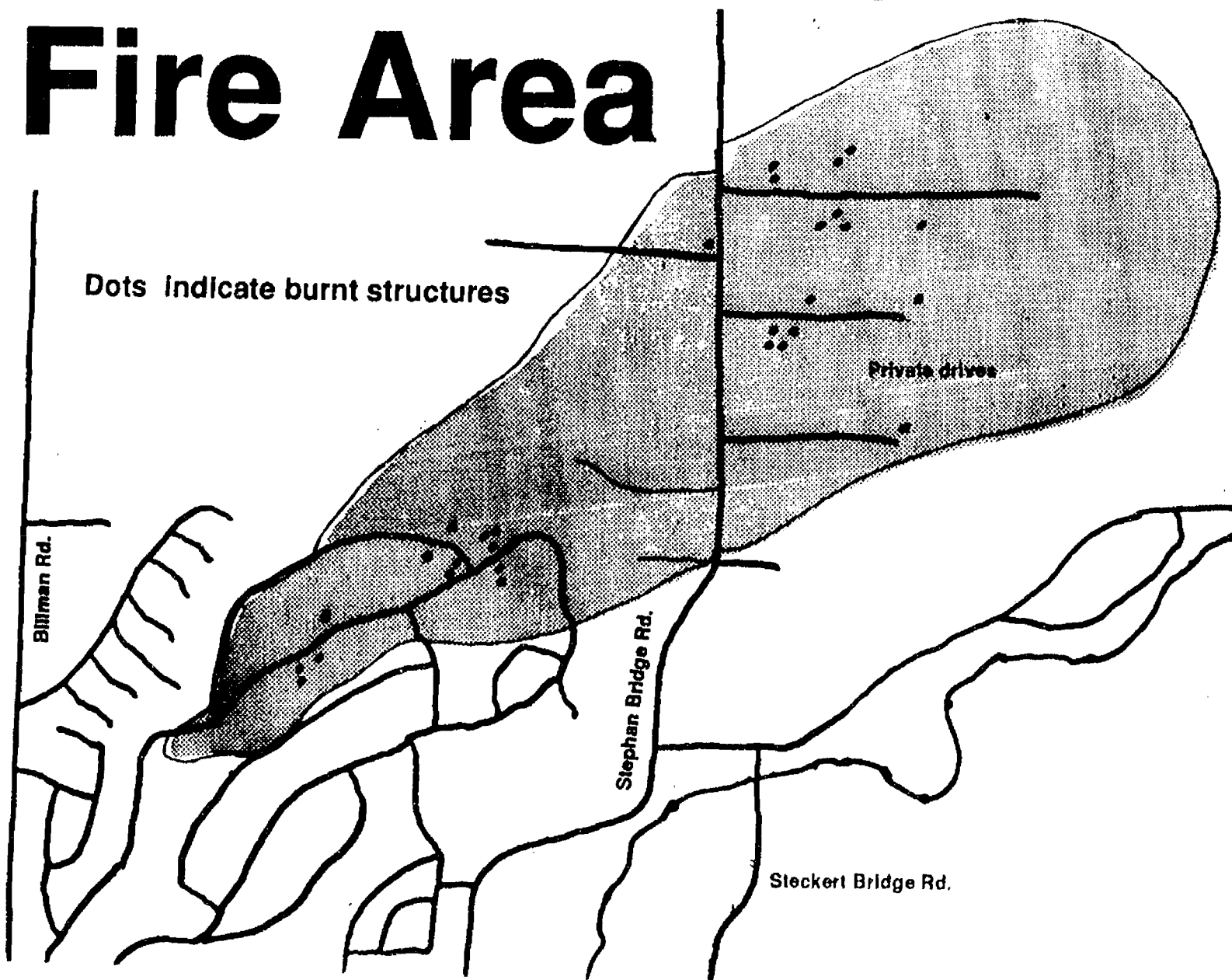


# AuSable River Fire Area



## Fire Destroys

## South Branch Fire Area



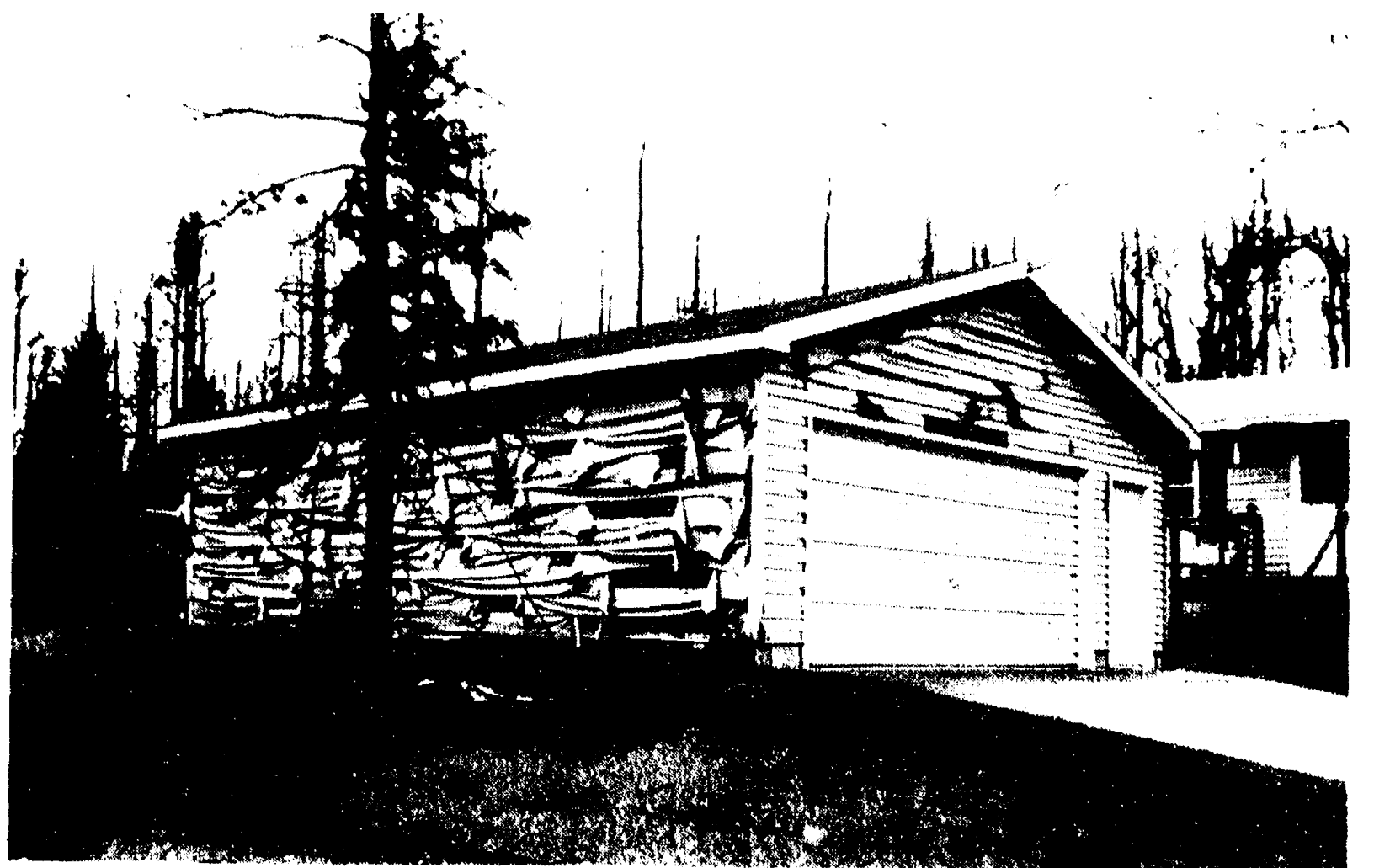
**CROWN FIRE**--Flames from the AuSable River fire could be seen above the trees. The blaze was a crown fire which is nearly impossible to stop.  
Photo by James Dennis



**TWO STORY HOME**--This home was located on Pappy's Trail.  
Photo by Jon Thompson



**DELEON HOME**--Only the chimneys and satellite dish remained of the Paul DeLeon home.



**INTENSE HEAT**--Fire destroyed Robert Muschiana's pole barn, but only melted the vinyl siding on his home and garage.  
Photo by Jon Thompson

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# Avalanche

## 5,000 Acres Burned

# Fire Losses Hit \$3.5 Million

By Irene Pettyjohn

The most destructive forest fire in Crawford County history swept through the area on Tuesday, May 8, destroying homes and outbuildings valued at nearly \$3.5 million. The DNR said the fire was started by "human activity."

Miraculously, the only fire related injury reported was smoke inhalation by a fireman who was treated and released from Mercy Hospital. The injury occurred during the evacuation effort when the fireman pushed open a door and was met with a thick cloud of black smoke.

Reprinted from May 17th issue

***The fire burned more than 5,000 acres destroying 81 residences (year-round homes, vacation homes, cabins and mobile homes), 115 outbuildings, and 37 motor vehicles such as snowmobiles, ORV's, boats, trucks, and cars.***

The DNR estimates the fire burned more than 5,500 acres destroying 81 residences (year-round homes, vacation homes, cabins and mobile homes), 115 outbuildings, and 37 motor vehicles such as snowmobiles, ORV's, boats, trucks, and cars. Of the total acres burned, Grayling Township assistant assessor Curt Marshall estimated that approximately 3,500 acres was residential acreage valued at about \$850,000.

DNR fire officer Duane Brooks said the fire could be the most expensive forest fire in Michigan's history.

He said the fire appeared to have started off Thendara Road and burned out of control from about 3:56 to 11 p.m. The fire traveled in a north easterly direction for about nine miles jumping Stephen Bridge Road just south of the bridge, the AuSable River at Guides Rest, and North Down River Road twice before it was contained in a swampy area near Dyer Trail. It was finally extinguished by heavy rains on Thursday.

Governor James Blanchard declared the county a disaster area at about 10:50 p.m. on Tuesday and he and DNR director David Hales visited the burned area on Wednesday afternoon. Designation as a disaster area will allow victims to apply for

state aid to help with reconstruction efforts.

DNR fire fighting units from all over northern and north central Michigan were called in to battle the blaze. Volunteer fire departments from surrounding counties, as well as every fire dept. in Crawford County assisted in the fire fighting effort. The Michigan National Guard fire unit assisted with men and equipment. An Ohio National Guard helicopter crew fought the fire with their Bambi Bucket until additional helicopters could be flown in by the Michigan National Guard. Eventually three buckets were used to carry water to the fire.

The Crawford County Sheriff Dept. was assisted by the Michigan State Police, military MP's, and sheriff departments from several neighboring counties. Conservation officers were called in from all over northern Michigan.

About 150 persons worked together to evacuate the area, contain the fire, and control traffic. Equipment at the fire included 73 tractors/plows and water units.

Brooks said there was machinery lined up for about a block down both sides of Stephens Bridge Road.

More than 300 persons were evacuated Tuesday afternoon. Shelter was provided at the Michelson Memorial United

***DNR fire officer Duane Brooks said the fire could be the most expensive forest fire in Michigan's history.***

Methodist Church, the Grayling High School gymnasium and Camp Grayling. Some stayed with friends.

Residents were allowed to return to the evacuated area about 4 p.m. on Wednesday afternoon. Some residents complained because they had been kept out of the area 17 hours after the fire had been contained, but Brooks said this was necessary to allow the electric utilities time to cut power to all downed electric wires and to ensure there was no further danger of propane gas tank explosions.

Many of those who had been evacuated returned to find their homes as they had left them, but others found only ash where their homes once stood.



**TOTAL LOSS--**This is all that remained of Carl and Sally Yost's home on Stephan Bridge Road. After consuming their home the fire traveled on, leaving their garage intact. Photo by Irene Pettyjohn



**CLOUDS OF SMOKE --** The billowing clouds of smoke that rose above the tree tops warned residents for miles that a major forest fire was ripping through the county. The smoke could be smelled in Grayling.

## Losses at \$500,000

# South Branch Fire Burns 615 Acres

By Irene Pettyjohn

At the same time fire fighters were fighting the big fire, two smaller fires were burning in South Branch Township.

DNR officials believe a downed power line started the fire on Sunrise Road off McMasters Bridge Road that burned about 15 acres. The third fire was located in the Indian Glens subdivision, near the Roscommon County line and burned about 615 acres before fire fighters were able to bring it under control.

The Indian Glens fire was spotted at 5:06 p.m. by the DNR airplane. It was contained at 4:30 a.m.

"The rain at 8:30 that night really contained the fire," said Jim Fisher, DNR fire supervisor, "but we didn't call it contained until we had a line around the fire."

Fisher said an initial estimate of structure damage, suppression costs and timber damage is \$500,000. He said one pole barn contained nine snowmobiles, four ORV's and several pieces of heavy equipment.

"Those kinds of losses add up fast," he said.

Property destroyed in South Branch Township included five motor homes, ten travel trailers, 15 sheds, one automobile, two pole barns and one garage. Property damaged included a travel

trailer, cabin and one home.

Fisher said one travel trailer that was thought to have survived the fire burned the following day when temperatures built up inside the trailer causing it catch fire. He said firemen saw smoke coming from the trailer, but it had already been gutted.

Most of the property destroyed in South Branch Township was privately owned. Fisher said he recommended that property owners contact a consulting forester for advice on replanting the burned woodlands.

Human activity was also cited by DNR officials as the cause of this fire.

Reprinted from May 17th issue

***"The rain at 8:30 that night really contained the [Indian Glens] fire," said Jim Fisher, DNR fire supervisor.***



**MECHANICAL SKELETONS--**Automobiles caught in the path of the fire became scrap metal. The rubber on these tires was melted leaving the van sitting on its rims. Photo by Jon Thompson



Property Losses

Grayling Township
Reprinted from May 17th issue

Table with 3 columns: Name, Address, Structures lost. Lists property losses for Grayling Township residents.

South Branch Township

Table with 3 columns: Name, Address, Structures lost. Lists property losses for South Branch Township residents.



SACK LUNCHES--Red Cross volunteers packed hundreds of sack lunches and then distributed them along with coffee and cold drinks to fire victims and volunteers working in the burned area.

Photo by Irene Pettyjohn

Community Support Poured In

As soon as people in Crawford County learned of the seriousness of the fire and its affect on their neighbors, the community began looking for ways to help. LTC Wayne Koppa, Camp Commander, open Camp Grayling's barracks for about 30 people Tuesday night. Glen's Market offered groceries to feed those who had been evacuated. Personnel from the 1071st ran a shuttle bus between Grayling and Camp Grayling, and between buildings on the base. Bobby Martinez stayed at the telephone, trying to help people calling the Camp locate their families and relay messages. Area ministers were contacted to talk to the people. Clark's and Mac's drug stores opened so that prescriptions left at home could be filled. Mercy Hospital offered free medical treatment to anyone suffering from injuries or illness caused by the fire and prepared breakfast and dinner at the Knights of Columbus hall on Thursday and Friday for fire victims. More than 2300 meals were served. Families from the Michelson Methodist church invited evacuated persons into their homes, and area motels offered rooms at no charge. Restaurants prepared and delivered food to the fire fighters and police agencies Tuesday night, and offered meals to fire victims. On Wednesday morning the Knights of Columbus hall became the community disaster relief center and representatives from the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Dept. of Social Services, and insurance companies began meeting with people whose homes had been destroyed by the fire. Crawford County Emergency Management director Howard Taylor began compiling information about the fire for state and federal agencies. Everyone who suffered any kind of loss as a result of Tuesday's fire is being asked to report the loss to Taylor so that a total assessment of the damage caused by the fire can be compiled. Governmental agencies use this information to determine the area's eligibility for low interest loans and grants. Fire victims are asked to report their losses even if they do not intend to request any type of assistance. In addition to scores of local volunteers, about 25 Red Cross volunteers from all over Michigan arrived to help with the recovery effort. The Red Cross nurse came from Nebraska. Throughout the week the numbers of homes lost and damaged and the number of persons affected by Tuesday's fire continued to increase as people registered at the disaster center. At Avalanche press time, the American Red Cross had registered 50 families. Thirty-seven families received financial assistance from the Red Cross at a cost of more than \$11,000. RaxAnn Adams, a volunteer at the center, said their records indicated that 48 year-round residences were completely destroyed by the fire, leaving 136 persons homeless. The estimated value for these homes is \$3,675,780 and she said that estimate is probably low. Adams said the estimated loss for both destroyed and damaged property is well over \$4.5 million. She said nearly 400 people have been affected by the fire. The good news is there appears to be all kinds of assistance available to fire victims through the American Red Cross, Salvation Army and DSS, but people must come into the disaster center as soon as possible and register with the various agencies there. "If they don't come in to see us," said Darlene Adas, a Red Cross family services officer, "we don't know they need help." Funds are available for security deposits, appliance replacement, utility bills, relocation expenses and other needs for those who qualify. Emotional support was made available to Grayling Elementary School students on Wednesday following the fire from the school district's social worker, Donna Ribaud, and Craig Hexham, of New Life Community Services. Children were encouraged to talk about the fire and Ribaud and Hexham were there to answer questions. Counselors at the Grayling High School also met with students whose homes were destroyed. Further support will be available on Monday, May 21, at 9 a.m., when Kristi McKenzie from the Lutheran Social Services of Michigan, holds a seminar on crises grief recovery at the Grayling Holiday Inn. Rev. Robert Gordon, pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church, said school counselors, clergy, or anyone in a position to counsel victims of the fire are encouraged to attend. Food, clothing, furniture and monetary donations have been arriving on a daily basis. A Petoskey radio station is putting on a fund raiser for Crawford County with \$10,000 as its goal. The Grayling Lions Club has offered \$3,000 and the Quality North Chevrolet Dealerships donated \$5,000. Assistant animal control officer Dixie Lobsinger was at the Crawford County Animal Shelter Tuesday night to accept pets from persons evacuated from their homes. She said ten puppies and a yellow lab were brought in for temporary housing. Reprinted from May 17th issue

Children Raise \$305.98 For Fire Victims

Age has not been a factor in the relief effort. Fifteen children, between the age of 6 and 19, sold cool aid, peanut butter cookies, and popcorn on Saturday and Sunday, May 12 and 13, at the corner of North Down River and Wakeley Bridge roads. On Saturday, the children raised \$38 and on Sunday they raised \$267.98. The money was taken by several of the children to Rev. Robert Gordon and asked that it be used to help victims of the fire. Pastor Gordon said several of the children came from families who are themselves, victims of the fire. The children's names are: James Love 10, Marty 7, Kahi Oberg 16, Becky Oberg 15, Jill Love 12, Jody Love 6, Mike Green 12, Susan Dedafoc 11, Louie Kehr 10, Janise Dedafoc 9, Wendy Dedafoc 7, Joshua Sheldon 8, Michelle Oberg 19, Chad Lingle 9, and Leah Lingle 12. Children from the Grayling Elementary School donated canned goods for the relief effort.

Musical To Aid Victims

A benefit musical for persons affected by the May 8 Crawford County fire will be presented by the Good News Choir of the Michelson Memorial United Methodist Church in Grayling. The Choir will perform the musical "Get On Board, Children" (or, what do you do on a rainy day in an ark?) on Sunday, May 20, at 6:30 p.m., at the Michelson Church, 400 Michigan Avenue, Grayling. Donations will be accepted, and the proceeds will go to the AuSable Ministerial Association for distribution.

DAV Funds Available To Disabled Vets

The Disabled American Veterans have disaster relief funds available for service connected disabled veterans who suffered losses in the fire. If you wish to apply for assistance please contact the Disabled American Veterans Service Office, 348-5645, in the Crawford County courthouse.

Red Cross Still Offering Assistance To Fire Victims

Disaster specialists of the American Red Cross are finishing up the assistance they've been giving victims of the May 8th fire that struck Crawford County. But after the Red Cross Service Center in the Knights of Columbus Hall relocates to 410 Cedar on Saturday, May 19th, help will still be available. Crawford Co. Chapter Executive, Bill Joseph, said that assistance will be available for anyone with unmet needs. "If there are any fire victims who have somehow slipped through the cracks, or may have thought they did not need help and have now discovered that they do, Red Cross can and will still be available to help," said Joseph. "There are also still cases in various stages of assistance and they will be able to stay in touch with Red Cross by calling the local chapter number at 517-348-9745." Joseph is joined by the Chapter Chairman, Paul Thomson, in urging all disaster victims to contact the American Red Cross if they have not done so. "All Red Cross disaster assistance is free and the victims are not expected to pay back any aid that they receive." Thomson noted that Red Cross aid in time of disaster is a gift of the American people.

Reprinted from May 24



DONATED--Dog and cat food was donated to the Crawford County Animal Control Shelter for our four-legged fire victims. Pictured with the food are K-Mart Assistant Manager Judy Morgan and husband Bud. Other K-Mart donors were Joyce Martin, Tami Cook, Marsha Kroell, Rose Ames, Chris Hanger, and friend Ken Irish.



BURNED OUT--Jonathan, Kimberly and six month old Amanda Weymers were downstate when Tuesday's fire destroyed their home on North Down River Road. The Weymers are shown with Red Cross volunteers.



# What Comes Next in Aftermath of Fire?

As residents begin the rebuilding process, emergency services in the county are moving from their mass care phase that provided emergency shelters and dining hall meals to providing individual and possibly long term assistance to the victims of last week's fire.

Red Cross family services officer Darlene Adas said the Red Cross has financial assistance available for temporary housing at area motels and hotels, and can also help with some or all of the cost of rebuilding for individuals with limited resources. She said all assistance from the American Red Cross comes Reprinted from May 17th issue

## Some Residents Will Rebuild

By Irene Pettyjohn

John Murray, a victim of the fire, who lost his home on the corner of Shaw Park and Stephan Bridge roads, said he had been told for years that Crawford County with all its Jack Pines was a prime candidate for a devastating forest fire, but said he never believed it.

"I always knew it was going to happen," said DNR fire officer Duane Brooks. "I just didn't know when."

Murray said his insurance would not replace everything he had lost in the fire. He said he would be able to replace his home and most of its contents, but not his garage or recreation vehicles.

"I'll rebuild," he said, "but then I am going to think seriously about putting the place up for sale. Two fires in three years is enough for me," said Murray.

A chimney is all that remains of Linda and John Speese's house on North Down River Road. Linda and John live in Oakland County and planned to retire in Crawford County in a few years. Besides their home, John said they lost 20 acres of woods that is now only a blackened graveyard of smoldering stumps.

from grants, not loans, and does not require repayment. She said representatives from the national office would be in the area as long as they are needed.

Donations of food and clothing are no longer needed, but temporary housing that can be rented for three to six months while families rebuild is desperately needed. Especially housing that will allow pets.

Grayling Township assistant assessor Curt Marshall said most of the people he talked to intend to rebuild their homes as soon as possible. Rebuilding the destroyed forests will take

"It's crazy," said Linda, "the woods are gone the house is gone, but not a single leaf on the peony that is located about 1 1/2 feet from where the house stood is even singed."

Jonathan, Kimberly and six month old Amanda Weymers had gone downstate to pick up a bed, and returned to find that everything but the bed had been destroyed by the fire. They did not have any insurance.

"We were just getting started up here," said 21-year old Jonathan. He said he was waiting until he got a better job before he got homeowners insurance.

Patrick and Peggy's mobile home was spared, but they lost their travel trailer and snowblower. Peggy said everything inside their home is covered with black smoke. They estimated their loss at \$15,000.

Two historic homes in the County were among the homes destroyed by fire. The Schreiber farm house, owned by Delbert Sheldon, was built in 1889 by Hugo Schreiber, Fay Bovee's grandfather.

The Hoffman farm, owned by Theodore Sieger, was also destroyed. Both homes were located on North Down River Road. Reprinted from May 17th issue

## Landowners Faced With Tough Choices About Burned Timber

By Irene Pettyjohn

Experts in the field of forest management met with Crawford County landowners last Friday at the courthouse to suggest ways of salvaging their burned timber and reforest their properties.

Foresters Jim McMillan, from the DNR, and Jim Wadsworth, from Weyerhaeuser, Barb Stauffer, from the U. S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and the Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service (ASCS), and Roy Spangler, from the Cooperative Extension Services explained to landowners several options available to them regarding their timber salvage efforts.

Wadsworth told the group the Weyerhaeuser Structurwood Plant was going to try to increase its consumption of jack pine from 25 percent to 30 or 40 percent in an effort to offer an increased market for Crawford County landowners who lost their forests in May 8th's devastating fire.

Weyerhaeuser is also offering the services of their foresters, Wadsworth and Mike Castle, as consultants to fire victims to help them make important decisions such as when to harvest, whether to harvest, what markets are available to them and finally what to do with the land. Landowners will also have to decide whether they want to let the forest reforest itself naturally with jack pines, or choose to plant other types of trees.

General manager of the Grayling Weyerhaeuser plant Rodger Anger said the effort on their part was in no way intended to be opportunistic, but rather to offer their assistance in the community's resource recovery process.

McMillan told landowners the trees killed by the intense heat and fire on their property could still be valuable for pulp and saw logs if they act within the next 60 to 90 days to have it harvested. After that time, McMillan said bark beetles will begin destroying what is left of the wood.

Property owners with three acres or more appear to have a better chance of selling their timber to logging companies than small lot owners, said McMillan.

"The person with two acres or less will probably have to clear their land themselves," he said. "The more acreage a person has the more likely they are to be able to sell it commercially".

## Buildings In Clearings Fared Better

To the untrained observer, Tuesday's fire appeared to jump around taking this house and that one, but leaving the house over there without rhyme nor reason, but according to DNR officials, in many cases there were precise reasons why some structures burned and other did not.

On Good Morning Michigan this week, Scott Heather, from the DNR Regional Headquarters in Roscommon, told viewers that buildings in clearings, away from pine trees, fared much better than those sitting in a wooded area.

During the program, Heather suggested that homeowners cut pine trees back 75 feet from their structures and replace them with less flammable trees such as maples, oaks, and poplars. Shrubs should be planted next to buildings.

Other suggestions included keeping wood piles away from buildings and leaving a hose connected to an outside faucet.

Reprinted from May 17th issue

much longer. DNR officials are estimating reforestation will take 50 years.

Meanwhile Forestry Management is busy inventorying the damaged forest and plans to offer the salvageable timber for sale.

Jim McMillan, DNR forest manager, said damaged jack pines would be chipped and offered to cogeneration plants in Midland, Lincoln and Hillman. The larger red pines (over 10 inches in diameter) will be sold for timber. Because of the threat of damage from bark beetles, McMillan said the timber harvest would have to take within the next three weeks or so.

Another victim of Tuesday's fire is the tiny Kirtland's warbler. About a quarter of the "active" warbler habitat located on Bald Hill Road between Grayling and Lovells was destroyed as well as about half of an "on-line" plantation being developed for future use. Dr. Sylvia Taylor, district wildlife biologist at Mio, said the burned portion of the plantation, planted this spring, had a value of about \$50,000.

"We would have lost a lot more active habitat if the new plantation hadn't acted like a fire break," she said. "We cannot have fires like that."

In an effort to cut down the numbers of forest fires, Dr. Taylor said the DNR has developed the Kirtland's Plan which

will provide more warbler habitat by keeping the forest young. She said the plan is ideal because it will also provide the most production for timber and is the safest way to manage a jack pine forest. Since jack pines reforest themselves during a forest fire when the heat opens its pinecones spilling out the seeds, Dr. Taylor said the DNR will be artificially regenerating the forest by planting young trees.

"I know people have a hard time with clear cutting," said Dr. Taylor, "but these open areas serve as fire breaks and prevent large forest fires, like the Mack Lake fire."

What affect the lost Kirtland's warbler habitat destroyed in Tuesday's blaze will have on the endangered bird is still uncertain. Dr. Taylor said they will know more after they conduct their warbler census in June. She said she had not heard any Kirtland's warblers prior to the fire, but when she toured the burned area on Monday, she heard them singing.

Dr. Taylor said there is a Kirtland's habitat plantation near Red Oak and another near Lovells ready for the birds.

The Kirtland's warbler is an endangered species that divides its time between north central Michigan in the summer and the Bahamas during the winter. There are only about 200 pairs of the small birds left. The birds usually return to Michigan during the second week in May.



**FIRE BREAKS**--Fire fighters plowed wide ditches in an effort to save structures from the fire. Photo by Jon Thompson

## County Declared Disaster Area

As a result of the devastating fires which swept Crawford County earlier this month, the Federal Government has declared the county a disaster area. The declaration came after an audit of the damage completed by the Small Business Administration. Declaration of a disaster by the Federal Government makes Crawford County and the residents affected, eligible for a variety of services. These services could be in the form of actual services performed, technical advice, or financial assistance.

As a result of the declaration, a One Stop Assistance Center will be established at the Knights of Columbus Hall on Norway Street in Grayling. The center will be open to fire victims on Wednesday, May 30, from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m.; Thursday, May 31, from 8 a.m. until 7 p.m.; and again on Friday, June 1, from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. The phone number of the One Stop Assistance Center is 348-6502.

It would be a good idea for everyone who was affected by the fire to plan to stop by the One Stop Assistance Center. At the center will be representatives of all the agencies, federal, state, and local, who have services available to fire victims. This will include low interest loans through the SBA for the reconstruction of homes. Other organizations available at the center will have grant money available for those who qualify.

Fire victims are also reminded that there is an ample supply of food and clothing available. Persons who need any of these commodities are encouraged to contact the center.

Reprinted from May 31 issue

## Verse or Worse

By Joe Murphy

### Hell's Fury

The fire struck like Hell's fury  
The quiet country side became a raging hell  
Billowing smoke filled the air  
Full of wood smoke's smell

High winds in the jackpine forests  
Along with the weather being hot and dry  
Sent the fire scampering here and there  
Sending each containment plan awry

Fire units from the near by area  
Came to help as good neighbors do  
The D.N.R. and the National Guard  
And some private contractors too

Many homes were lost to the fire  
But their efforts saved quite a few  
Men working in that hot smoky hell  
Did all that men could do

No lives were lost in the fire  
Thanks to the evacuation plan  
That was first to save property when possible  
But first of all save man

When finally the fire was defeated  
With some help from the Man Above  
The fire's victims could find solace  
In an out pouring of Christian love

Folks rallied to help their neighbors  
In their great hour of need  
Hell's fury may have destroyed those homes  
But God's love made folks pay heed



**REFORESTATION**--Carrie Trudgeon, 20, of Grayling, and Angie Parker, 19, of Roscommon, are shown planting jack pine seedlings to replace the Kirtland's warbler habitat lost in the May 8th fire. As of Wednesday afternoon, the four member Michigan Youth Corps crew had planted over 7,000 trees. The project will continue for about three weeks. Not pictured are Henry Cousins and Scott Cochman, of Grayling.

**Articles and Photographs**  
Reprinted from May 10, 17,  
24, and 31st Issues of the  
Crawford Co. Avalanche



# Opinions

Articles and Photographs  
Reprinted from May 10, 17,  
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## Northern Views

By Jon Thompson

Here are ten things I'll carry with me from that tragic fire:

1. Anyone who felt or saw that horrible wind pushing the forest fire knows how lucky we are that no human life was lost.
2. At one point Tuesday afternoon on May 8 there were two large fires in Grayling Township, one large fire in South Branch, and several small ones along Arrowhead Rd. One fire was moving toward Lovells and the South Branch and Arrowhead fires were pointed in the direction of Grayling. As strong as the wind was blowing and as dry as this county has been, guess what scary thoughts started creeping into people's thoughts?
3. Our policemen, DNR conservation officers, DNR, Camp Grayling, township, and city firefighters put in some heroic efforts. Please store that in your memories.
4. At nearly the same time Tuesday night that some people were actually praying for the rain to hit the fire area, the first reports of looting came in. I was madder than hell. But later on it became apparent the number of good people wanting to help outnumbered the looters probably 10,000 to 10.
5. The millions of dollars lost may grab headlines but the losses that seem to hurt the most are the possessions lost that hold special memories. Possessions treasured because they can never be replaced.
6. I don't agree with letting the Governor and media into the area before the homeowners. Homeowners deserve to be put in front of politicians and media.
7. "The 2nd week of May." I had an eerie feeling the first time in 1983 I heard DNR firefighter Duane Brooks say that the 2nd week in May has traditionally been the worst week of the year for fires in Crawford County. Almost all the big fires have struck during that one week.
8. We had that week's newspaper just about finished Tuesday afternoon when the fire struck. Because of all the rumors flying around, we rebuilt pages to include a forest fire story, stayed up all night covering the action, and took the pages to the printer in Gaylord at 5:30 a.m. hoping to have newspapers back in Grayling earlier than usual for people wanting information. A part broke on the press and we didn't get the newspapers back to town until 9:15 a.m.
9. We have some of the most independent, stubborn people in the nation living in our county. But during a disaster, they're also the strongest, most determined, and even the most caring.
10. Something that made the loss of all the homes, structures, possessions, pets, wildlife, and forests even tougher to swallow was an observation by Grayling firefighter Dean Goss on Wednesday after the fires: "If this rain had come a day sooner, all those houses and everything would still be here."

## Thank You National Guards

To the Editor:

Following the fire on May 8 I returned to my home. Though I lost my garage and sustained some damage to the rear of my home, the house and its contents were saved.

While inspecting the house, two young men drove up and introduced themselves as firefighters from Frederic. As they were driving past my home, the day of the fire, they glimpsed an orange light in the garage, which turned out

to be a blaze at the rear. I am sorry that I did not get the names of the gentlemen who surely saved my home.

To them and to all of the wonderful people who have shown so much courage, care, and concern, I want to give my thanks.

The kindness shown to me by everyone involved since the fire will never be forgotten.

Norma G. Hull  
Grayling

## Kindness Will Never Be Forgotten

To the Editor:

I am a proud resident of Grayling and have been for 50 years. In all that time I have seen old business go and new come in. I have lived most of the 50 years at Lake Margrethe, only a couple of miles from the National Guard Camp. In all those years I have never been bothered by the noise or the Guards themselves personally. In fact, I

for one am glad they are here. When we hear the "noise" we should feel secure in knowing we have them here to protect us in case they are needed. They have come through for Grayling many times - one example is the recent fire.

I for one would like to salute the National Guard here in Grayling.

Gloria A. Alef  
Grayling

## Believes in Miracles

Editor:

I believe in miracles and would like to thank Dean Goss and all the fire fighters who worked so hard to save my home on Stephan Bridge

Road. It is a miracle that my home is still standing.

M. Frankenfield

## Letters to the Editor

### Crawford County Is Filled With Wonderful, Caring People

Dear Jon,

I have never written a letter to an Editor before, but I think the events of the past few days warrant it.

I want to thank everyone who had anything to do with fighting the fire and furnishing aid and comfort to the fighters and evacuees alike.

To our dear Lord, His holy Mother, His Angels, and His Saints for mercifully sparing the lives of all the people involved and for sparing the homes He did, ours included. For the saving and healing rain that got here just in the nick of time. We are not worthy. Thank you.

We had dear friends and neighbors who lost everything they owned in the fire and we are so very, very sorry. But you already know....

To Rex and Barbara Shepard for opening their hearts and their homes to us while the fire burned. To Rudy and Bobbie Martinez for the kind offer of their home to us, and to Terry and Rosemary Gallagher of Rosemary who offered us an apartment. Thank you.

To the people who gave us their best wishes, their prayers and their love, at Glen's, the Grayling Country Club, Moore's Auto Parts, you know who you are... thanks you.

A very sincere, from the bottom of our hearts, THANK YOU and job well done, to every DNR Crew, all the fire department who come from all over Northern Michigan and the Michigan National Guard Units 1439th and 1440th for risking life and limb to contain this horrible, devastating fire. To Duane and Brenda LaMotte at "Function Junction" for a warm place to sit and hot coffee, comfort and kind words while we waited to go back to the burned over area.

In mentioning the National Guard, men from the 1439th and 1440th manned the Camp Grayling fire trucks and dozers, assisting the DNR and all the fire departments in containing the fire.

A special congratulations and job well done to SSG Tom Shepard, SSG Dick LaPan and SPC 4 Tom Baldwin for keeping Gate's AuSable Fishing Lodge protected during the fire. You will never get it from him. Mr. Gates was quoted as saying it was an act of God that kept his lodge from burning. Knowing his attitude toward the Guard and how the majority of people feel toward him, I would say it was an act of God that you buried your personal feelings and kept spraying. Well done Gentlemen.

ISU set up twenty four hour phone watch and guided evacuees to assistance. 1438th Engineers set up a dining hall on Camp Grayling and pro-

vided beds for evacuees. Thank you.

1071 HEMCO was attending AT or summer camp when the fire occurred, and they were the first to get flood lights set up and portable generators running at the fire command center. Those generators were manned for over thirty six hours by members of 1071st. The Mess Section started cooking food, provided by Glen's at no charge, about 10:00 p.m., Tuesday night to provide hot meals for the firefighters and evacuees. They cooked all night long Tuesday and all day Wednesday. They finally turned over food operations to the Red Cross Thursday in the morning. They provided a shuttle bus to transport evacuees out to Camp Grayling and shelter. Thank you.

Brigadier General Schulte, Adjutant General of the Ohio National Guard, offered the men and equipment that were here to help fight the fire and he made it known that if they weren't enough, he would send more. The helicopters that carried the huge buckets full of water to help drench the fire belonged to Ohio National Guard. Thank you. To all units of Camp Grayling, and the Ohio National Guard, Gentlemen, and Ladies, you can be proud of yourselves and your Units. Well done.

To the Michigan State Police, the Crawford County Sheriff's Department, The Roscommon County Sheriff's Department and all other police departments I don't know about, and the people behind the scenes at these departments, for their fast action in setting up road blocks and evacuating all of us, the maintenance of those road blocks had to require considerable patience, and you came through with flying colors. For patrolling the fire devastated areas after the fires went through, for acting as guides to those of us who needed to see if we still had homes, thank you.

To the local chapter Red Cross Volunteers and Insurance Agents, the Pastors of all the churches and all the businesses in Grayling who provided food, bedding, care, comfort and spiritual guidance during this most trying of times. Thank you and God Bless you.

To Top 'O Michigan Rural Electric Company and GTE North for their co-operation during the fire and for the quick restoration of services after the fire. Thank you. To all the people who washed dishes, served food, donated clothing, blankets, comfort, your time, to everyone of you, thank you and God bless you.

## Resource Review

By Bruce Patrick,  
Conservation Officer

The Stephan Bridge Road Fire of 1990 is now history, and a terrible memory for hundreds of people. As I write this, I do not know the final figure for lost homes, garages and property. Roughly 70 structures with an estimate value of 2.5 million dollars were lost according to preliminary estimates. As great a tragedy as this is, it is nothing short of miraculous that there were no deaths or serious injuries. This kind of wind driven wildfire can race at terrifying speed, consuming everything in its path.

I honestly feel that deaths would have occurred had it not been for the efforts of a handful of Conservation Officers and Sheriff's Deputies who risked their own lives to warn and evacuate residents in the path of the fire. I cannot

say enough about what the officers did to help the residents of the area.

Something else that most people do not realize is that we nearly lost a DNR pilot airplane. The Aircraft was working the fire when the engine quit at low altitude. The pilot was attempting to land on North Down River Road, but could not because it was filled with traffic. Mostly gawkers. Fortunately, he was able to restart the engine and barely made the Grayling Airport.

DNR firefighters were also at risk as they attempted to save what they could for people in the area. You may not like everything the Department of Natural Resources does, but it is a public service agency. This was very evident in the late afternoon of May 8, 1990.

To you Jon, last, but certainly not least, and to your staff for the fine coverage of the fire in the Crawford County Avalanche. Your information helped answer a lot of questions. Thank you.

If I have missed anyone, I ask your forgiveness, it was not intentional. Thank you and God bless you.

Crawford County is filled with wonderful, caring people. It's a terrific place to live.

Lynda K. Hetrick

## Thanks Again

To the Editor:

Many thanks to our immediate family, D.N.R. officer Bruce Patrick, Red Cross, and all those people too numerous to mention for all they have done to help us. Thanks again and again.

Mr. & Mrs. Charles Dixon

## Tremendous Job Done

As one of many private citizens I wish to commend all who had a part in the evacuating of all the people the day of the fire. The Fire Fighters, D.N.R., National Guards, Sheriff Departments, and all who helped. You did a tremendous job and in such a brief time. Many thanks to you all.

M. Smith

## Notes from the Woods

By Nancy Lemmen

Tuesday, May 8, 1990.

Now to tell Dave. At six o'clock, the two of us had been sitting in Taste of Traverse eating an early dinner of vegetable lasagna and frozen lemon yogurt. In the short span of one and one half hours since then, I have been to the inferno and back.

So now to tell Dave. But what and how to tell him? I am not very good at dissembling, so I report the simple truth as I know it:

There has been a horrible forest fire. I saw the garage burning. Moments later I saw the house burning. I do not have the animals with me.

His response is a wail: I can live without the house, but I can't live without the animals.

I don't think they are alive, I tell him. I saw the house and I saw the garage, but I did not see them. Although I tried, I tell him. I heard the reports of fire as I drove toward Grayling, and I defied a roadblock to get home, and I tried hard to save them, but I don't think...

I wait for an hour or more as he drives from Traverse City to Grayling alone. He tells me later that in the car, he called out the names of the pets. Jody. Missy. Murphy. Ally. If his calling their names again and again could have saved them, they would be here with us today.

Meanwhile darkness descends and a chill sets in and the tardy rain begins to fall. We meet somewhere along North Down River Road at nine o'clock and wait with all the others for some news. When can we return to our homes? Are there homes standing to which we can return? Rumors swirl and conflicting reports abound.

I see a small black dog with a woman, who is using a towel in place of a leash. The dog looks like Murphy. I shine my flashlight on him and the woman recoils as if she thinks I will take him from her. But I will not, because he is not my Murphy.

That night we wait until eleven, then leave with friends. They will house us and nourish us in the next few hours and the next few days, as the magnitude of the disaster unfolds.

We are surrounded by good people who comfort us until twelve, then until one, and finally, until two, when we stumble off to the bedroom. Dave and I talk until three, until four, until five. Perhaps we drift in and out of sleep for a few minutes between five and six, when we get up. We want to go home.

When the officials finally let us back, we go first to the garage. Surely the kitten Ally died in the house, but maybe - MAYBE - the dogs escaped under the fence. They have done it before. We see a fresh hole and for a few moments we feel hope for the first time since the evening before.

It is shortlived. Our friends find the remains of Murphy, then Missy. Dave is stoic, but now I wail. They look further for Jody, but cannot find her. I am distressed because I want her buried with her kennelmates.

Dave and I are like parents who, though sickened by the messes of others, can easily and lovingly clean the vomit and the offal of their own children. We pick up the charred remains of our dogs and take them to be buried next to Buddy.

When we buried Buddy four years ago, we sent him to the afterworld with food and treats and balls and sticks

## Thank You Letters Accepted Here

In the aftermath of the May 8th forest fires, the Avalanche will be accepting thank you notes from fire victims and will publish them free of charge on our letters to the editor page.

## Heartwarming To See How Community Joined Together

Dear Editor,

My sympathy goes out to those residents who lost their homes and property in the devastating fire which swept through the AuSable River Valley this last week. We should all be grateful that lives were not lost. It is extremely heartwarming to see how the community joined together to give its time, resources, and especially themselves during this crisis.

I have been spending much of my time in the Grayling area for the last 17 years. Needless to say, I feel as though I am a part of that community. The concern for preservation of nature and the environment and quality of life is shared by all. This is evident in how quickly the DNR, the American Red Cross, the National Guard, local businesses and concerned individuals reacted to relieve the suffering and property loss of their neighbors.

With so much of my time spent in Grayling, it's been hard to avoid the conflict between AMAC, the Anglers, the AuSable Conservation Trust and the National Guard. But when the chips were down, who came through? Of all these groups, the only organized effort I saw was the National Guard - housing and feeding evacuees and lending a hand wherever needed.

If I had to "choose sides" in this debate, I don't think it would surprise anyone if I went for the Grayling Community and the National Guard. As far as I can tell, they are one and the same.

Bob Sauvage  
Bay City

## So Many Care

A big thank you from the families of Pappy's Trail to everyone who worked so hard to save our homes. Also to the policeman who helped evacuate.

Also to Borchers Canoe rental who let us camp out and enjoy a home cooked breakfast.

The nightmare of this will always stay with us but the comfort of knowing there are so many people who care is a big help.

Grant and Cheryl  
Alandt

to sustain him in his journey. We have no such niceties to send with Missy and Murphy, but I suspect that they will not be needing sustenance or toys.

They take only their bells, which they wore in this world, so we could track them as they ran off on their various unapproved adventures. Dave says later that for a moment he wished he had kept the bells. But then, he adds, they would only have served as a reminder of the dogs and he does not need bells to remind him of Missy and Murphy.

We are miffed at Missy. She was the lead dog, and she has tricked us so many times in the past to sneak off and into trouble. Why did she not use her wiles to escape this time? Perhaps she tried. Perhaps the space under the fence was her futile attempt.

We try to accept that our life with our pets is over. In the days and months and years to come, we will grieve for:

Jody, the mangy puppy that became the grand dame of our family. Our greying, arthritic 13-year-old black Lab/German short hair pointer was my birthday gift from Dave in 1977. In her prime, Jody was a combination of mountain goat, Earth mother and Prom queen. A team player, she refused to be an only dog after Buddy died in 1986, so we got her...

Missy, a lovely, spirited, athletic yellow Lab cross that was about to be shot by an owner who could not tolerate her chasing the deer in his yard. Usually we called her "Mischief." Other animals adored Missy, even the neighbor cats and our own kitten. We took her through three terms of dog obedience classes, so that our friends and family might love her too. She was the best buddy of...

Murphy, an eternally happy, wiggly mutt that looked like a miniature black Lab. Dave found him abandoned under a mobile home in the winter of 1987 and brought him home. Dave and Murphy were "the guys." The two of them would regularly curl up on the couch for an evening of good reading. Occasionally he would do the same with me. He was a little frightened of...

Ally, a wild yet gentle six-month-old grey kitten. We were just getting to know her, but already loved her. In bed Dave would fall asleep with his arm crooked to make a place for her when she was ready to settle down for the night. When he awoke near morning, she would be curled up against his arm, waiting to have her neck scratched and her tummy stroked.

I find her little grey bones in the area that had been our kitchen. We bury them in one of the many holes that Murphy had dug on the property in his constant quest to subdue the gopher and chipmunk traffic.

And yes, we lost our home and all of our belongings. I will deal with that loss later, but today it seems only a footnote to the four little lives that went with the fire.

I remember this quotation by Sophia Loren, of all people. She said, "Never love anything that can't love you back." When I read it years ago, I thought it seemed wise counsel. I still do today, even as I recall the literally thousands of items that I erroneously believed made up my existence.

Of course it was not the things. It was our family and our friends and our pets. Today I can only trust that to the end, those little creatures knew how beloved they were to us and how lonely we would be without them.



## Letters to the Editor

## Homeowners Should Come Ahead of Governor's Inspection

Dear Sirs:  
This is a letter in thanks to the DNR and the people who were directly involved in fighting the fire.

My wife's cottage and the homes of her relatives next to us were spared. It is clear that the fire fighters stopped the fire from reaching one of our homes, for which we are all very thankful, especially since five cottages and homes near us were not as fortunate. Even though there was a great loss of property, it is clear that the fire fighters saved many homes by their direct efforts.

through the area, property owners were kept out of the area much longer than was necessary. There were four reasons given at different times why the property owners were not allowed to enter the fire area: 1. Hot spots; 2. Downed power lines; 3. Looters in the area; and the worst one of all 4. The Governor had not inspected the area yet. During the height of the fire all people must be kept out of the fire area to facilitate the fighting of the fire and prevent confusion, but I do not believe that because the Governor is going to inspect the area he has more rights than the property owners whose property is directly involved. Allowing property owners access to their property would not have interfered with the Governor's flight over the area. Property owners gathered at the corner of Stephan Bridge Road and N. Down River Road were incensed at this one.

Once the immediate fire danger had passed, none of those reasons have any valid-

ity over the rights of the property owners to inspect and protect their property, especially those of permanent residents. The permanent residents should have been allowed in immediately even if there was some danger to themselves on showing proof of residency in the fire area, i.e. drivers license. Non-resident property owners should be allowed in on furnishing proof of ownership, i.e. copy of tax notice or a simple not official stationary issued by the township or county treasurer stating that the person owns property in the fire area. By allowing property owners in, they could fight the hot spots themselves, stop looters, and direct linemen as needed.

I was allowed in some 16 hours after the fire had been brought under control and some 20 hours after the fire had passed by my home. There were still smoldering logs and stumps that I put out. I was able to save the phone and electric line men needless duplication of effort and time

by telling them our wires were OK and that our neighbor's wire was not. Several electric and phone linemen came to inspect the lines and were able to continue on without having to check further.

The biggest problem was with gawkers and sightseers. I can not believe the number of curiosity seekers who drove in just to see what had happened, including two different instances where people with trucks drove in and when they saw my wife or me they

left in a big hurry.

Road blocks are necessary, especially to keep out people who have no legitimate reason to be there, but the property owners, especially permanent residents, should have been allowed in as soon as the imminent danger had passed and it was daylight.

Thank you fire fighters on behalf of myself and my immediate neighbors. For those who were not so fortunate, my heartfelt sympathy.

John B. Pruchnicki  
Flushing, MI

## Let's Talk About It

By Joe Murphy



The tragic fire that struck our area on the eighth of May was the most costly in property in our county's history. But we can all be thankful that no lives were lost. The fact that the number one priority was evacuating folks from the endangered areas is highly commendable. Property can be replaced, human life can't. Perhaps more could have been saved but at the cost of human lives. My heart goes out to those that lost their homes. But I feel a great deal of pride of the way folks pitched in to help their neighbors in their time of need. Fire departments from many surrounding towns were there to help. City Police Officer Dennis Long tells of while manning a road block a fire truck manned by two young ladies from Lewiston appeared through the heavy smoke. They asked him if there was a home near by. He replied that one that might have already burned was back in on a nearby road. They said they'd check and took off through the heavy smoke. He became worried when they didn't come back and went in to find them busy saving the home. There were many acts of heroism on that tragic day. We should say a big Thank You to everyone who worked so hard to contain that terrible fire.

The outpouring of aid for the fire's victims again proves that concern and love for others is alive and well in this area. Sometimes we tend to feel that neighbor helping neighbor is a thing of the past. Then in times of need the outpouring of Christian love people demonstrate proves us wrong. To everyone who stepped forward to offer help to the fire's victims another big Thank You for restoring my faith in human nature.

Another point I wish to make is while we expect the fire department, the D.N.R., and the National Guard to commit and endanger men and equipment in fighting fire, there were many private contractors who furnished men and equipment to the fire suppression efforts. Again I feel we owe them a big Thank You.

The local merchants were there to do all they could in supplying food both for the fire fighters and its victims. The school offered the victims a place of shelter. Again, Camp Grayling proved a good neighbor in opening buildings for the over flow from the school. The Red Cross was right on the job along with many others to serve the needs of those evacuated from the fire's path. I know there are many that gave aid that I may have failed to mention. A Big Thank You To All Who Helped In Any Way On That Tragic Day And Its Aftermath. I am very proud to be a part of this area and its caring people.

I think that full page ad that appeared in last week's Avalanche was very impressive and will do much to show that Crawford County residents are not all anti Camp Grayling or industrial growth. All of us want to see our environment protected and improved but balanced by the reality of the need for growth and development. We cannot shut down all growth and still provide a livelihood for those younger folks that also wish to live here. The vast majority of our residents see the need for controls, and we have agencies charged with that responsibility; let's give them a chance to do their job. I wish to Thank everyone who signed and or contributed to help pay for the ad. Thank You For Caring.

## Let Us Help Now And Someday You Can Be On The Giving End

An Open Letter To The Fire Victims:

I am going to presume to speak for the rest of the community, although I have no right, but I want you to understand how most of us feel. From the moment we heard of the devastating fire on Tuesday, we have prayed for life and safety; we have agonized over how best to show our support when we realized what a true tragedy it was going to be for so many people.

By Wednesday everyone I know was either calling or showing up at the various relief agencies around town, saying "How can I help? What can I do? What is needed?" And the answers were neither simple nor certain, because we could only imagine your loss, not having gone through it ourselves. What we did know is how it feels to stand helplessly by while our friends and neighbors lose everything they have worked for all their lives. We had to do something, but what?

In most cases we have tried to find our own answers; money and household supplies, clothing and food came

pouring in; churches were mobilized to handle the influx. The Knights of Columbus opened their hall to rescue workers, Red Cross and Social Services; volunteers manned phones and helped with logistics. Businesses, stores, the hospital, the National Guard, and others all began in their various ways to try to minimize the damage. People from other communities throughout the state called — or came — or sent things, because they too, needed to do something.

What prompted this letter are two families I know of that were affected by the fire — one is too proud to take "hand-outs"; another is hesitant, saying that "other people may need it worse than we do." We are wondering if some of you might feel the way one of these families does. Please don't! We're all in this world together, and when we're up against forces we can't control, no one should have to — or should try to — stand alone. Many of you are covered by insurance and will eventually get your lives back on track. We're confident of that.

Also, we know it's not easy to accept "charity" — we all take pride in our self-sufficiency, right? But it shouldn't be difficult to accept love, and such an outpouring of love and concern I have never seen before! Let us help you now, for our sakes, if not for your own.

Take the money, the furniture, the clothes, the food, etc., and rebuild your lives; someday, when you're stronger, some of us will need to lean on you, and we know you'll be there!

Phyllis Hamilton

## DNR Thanks Community

Editor:

We wish to express our sincere gratitude for the way the public agencies and private sector pulled together on the recent wildfires in Crawford County.

It would be impossible to name all who provided heavy equipment, water tankers, food, etc. Township fire departments, county sheriff, state police, National Guard, and others joined forces with the Department of Natural Resources to form a coordinated evacuation/fire suppression team.

Similarly the townships, county, Red Cross, area schools, and churches and many private businesses and individuals rallied to assist the families who suffered the tragic loss of their homes. This effort continues.

To all who have joined in this total community effort Thank You.

Michigan Department of Natural Resources

## Heartful Thanks To All Who Helped

Editor:

A heartfelt "Thank You" to all the Fire Fighters, Law Enforcement Officers, National Guard, Red Cross Workers, Emergency Services Council, Volunteers, K of C Members & Spouses, Utility Service Employees, our Families (especially the Martella's and McDonnell's), many Friends and Neighbors for all their support, prayers and clean-up work during our

recent traumatic experience in the fire. We can't begin to thank each one of you enough. We are among the very fortunate who still have a home to return to. We ask that you continue to help and pray for those around us who do not. We can't begin to comprehend what they must be going through now and will continue to experience in the future.

Mike & Beth Wieland

## Grayling Fire Department Thanks Everyone For Support

Editor:

The Grayling Fire Department extends their sympathy to the victims of the fires on May 8th, 1990. We feel the helplessness you are feeling and our thoughts are with you.

We would also like to thank all persons connected with Emergency Services, civilians, and businesses for support during and after the fire

suppression efforts.

It's heartbreaking to realize that it takes a disaster of this magnitude for all of us to put aside our indifference and bond together for the attainment of the same goal; but heartwarming to know that we can, because we did - and did so because that's the way we are.

The Grayling Fire Department

## Reader Says DNR Should Stop Leasing Land To Oil Companies

Dear Mr. Thompson,

I would like to say that I am sorry to all the good folks that have lost their homes and everything in them and we all can be thankful that no one got hurt and no one lost their lives in the fire and I would like to thank each and every one that helped in anyway when we had this fire. We all became friends and helped

each other. I hope it will stay that way — just like Earth Day should be year round, not just for a day.

I would like to ask the DNR officers in Lansing to stop leasing the land to the oil companies because all you are doing is helping to damage the environment and harm the wildlife. I do not know if you people are for the oil compa-

nies or if you are for a clean environment. If you are for a clean environment then do not lease the land to the oil companies; the fire did too much damage and we do not need the oil companies to do any more damage than they are doing now to the environment.

Joe Stanek  
Grayling

## Still Paying Price For Cutting White Pine

Dear Jon:

The tragic fire at Grayling reestablishes one of the laws of nature. When the balance of nature is upset or altered, a price must be paid.

The price for the cutting down of the Amazonian rain forests will be paid for by our children and grandchildren by a gradual warming of the earth and its attendant disasters.

The price paid for by Southern Californians who build their homes over and over again in the canyons and ar-

royos that are dried by the Santa Ana winds, or cirrocco, is the destruction of those homes when the inevitable fires begin.

The price is still being paid for by us the for the massive cutting of the White Pine forests in Michigan. In your area, the immediate price was the siltation of the AuSable River and the loss of the Grayling trout. The successive price was the establishment of a Jack Pine forest that is genetically determined to burn periodi-

cally so that its pinecones can release their seeds. The immediate price is the loss of the homes of those who choose to build there.

My question is, unlike the Californians who build in tinderbox canyons or on the sides of mountains that periodically have mud slides that take homes down with them, have we learned from this disaster not to build in the same or similar environment again?

Michael H. Johnson  
Lansing, MI

## People Make Tragedy Easier To Accept

Never in a million years did we think that the home we grew up in would be taken away from us. At such a difficult and devastating time in our life, so many people have meant so much and made this tragedy a little easier to accept. We would like to thank the Red Cross for all their assistance and caring, the churches for food, clothing and linen, and all the unmen-

tioned for your love, support and kindness. We know saying "Thank You" may not be enough, but everything you've done has meant so much and we appreciate it more than we can express. You've made our life a lot brighter with your help as we start to rebuild our life. Thanks to everyone who volunteered.

The Del Sheldon Family

## Thanks To Firefighters

To all Firefighters and workers:

We extend to you our deepest gratitude and sincere thanks for your long hours of work and dedication during the fire of 1990! Thanks! To those who suffered loss from the fire, our love and heartfelt sympathy. God Bless.

The Johnsons  
Pine Road

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**ON SITE INSPECTION**--Governor James Blanchard and DNR director David Hales visited the burned area Wednesday afternoon. The governor said state aid would be made available to the victims of the fire. **Photo by Irene Pettyjohn**

## Property Damage Estimates Reach \$5.5 Million

By Irene Pettyjohn

Property damage estimates have reached the \$5.5 million mark as insurance companies continue to process claims from victims of the devastating forest fire that ripped through Crawford County on Tuesday, May 8.

George Stancil, vice president of the Cornell Agency, said preliminary estimates of losses insured by his agency alone have reached \$2 million and will go higher. He said two other Grayling independent insurance agencies, Sorenson and Grayling Insurance, have processed 26 more loss claims that total about \$650,000.

State Farm Insurance has approved in excess of \$600,000 in claims. Disaster supervisor for the agency, Bill Heemer, who has been working from a temporary office at the Grayling Holiday Inn, said they are still getting a trickle of claims, primarily for tree damage.

Herb Olson, agent for the Grayling Farm Bureau Insurance office, said his company has approved nearly \$200,000 in claims that varied from one total loss of a residence, destroyed recreational vehicles to smoke damage.

Total insured losses are estimated at \$5.5 million, but Stancil said a complete loss figure, insured and uninsured, is difficult to project because of the fluctuation of land values.

"It is not uncommon for us to process one million dollars in small claims during a year," said Stancil, "but \$2 million in one day puts a different color on things."

Stancil said, at last count, Cornell had processed claims for 31 total residential losses.

### RELIEF EFFORTS CONTINUE

As fire victims file for insurance claims, community relief efforts continue to try to help with its citizen's losses.

Last Friday, Crawford County emergency management director Howard Taylor announced that the federal government had declared the county a disaster area, making fire victims eligible for a variety of services. He said a One Stop Assistance Center will be established at the Knights of Columbus Hall on Norway Street beginning Wednesday, May 30, and concluding at 4 p.m. on Friday, June 1. (See details in separate article in this week's issue.)

In addition to Taylor, representatives of the Ministerial Association will be present to accept applications from victims of the fire.

Rev. Robert Gordon, president of the Ministerial Assoc., said his organization is asking everyone who has a need as a result of the fire, regardless of the size, to make application with them so that they can assess the community's needs and begin processing the applications, according to need. Gordon said the Ministerial Assoc. is hoping to have all applications by July 1st.

"The Salvation Army, American Red Cross and Michigan Dept. of Social Services are limited to type and quantity of services they can give," said Rev. Gordon. "We are not."

He said the Ministerial Assoc. will be focusing their assistance on needs not covered by the other agencies.

The organization of local clergy has received more than \$47,000 in donations for fire victims. These donations range from \$110.85 given by the Grayling Middle School fifth grade students, earned by collecting pop bottles, to a \$10,000 donation from Shell Western.

"The goal of this organization is to use these funds to help the fire victims," said Father Derik Roy, treasurer for the group, "not to have \$30,000 sitting in the bank this time next year."

"The folks who had the least and lost the most are the people we need to help the first," said Rev. Gordon. "But every application will be considered, and we will be extending financial support as long as the money holds out."

Clothing outlets are beginning to close their operations as the need for clothing is diminishing.

Rev. Gordon said a truck from St. Vincent DePaul, of Detroit, came to St. John Lutheran Church last Friday and took the clothing items not needed by fire victims. Inmates from the Crawford County Jail helped load the bags of clothing on the truck.

St. John Lutheran Church's fellowship hall and sanctuary have been so full of clothing since the fire that Sunday worship services were held outside on May 13, and at St. Mary's Catholic Church on May 20.

Clothing and food items will be available at the St. Mary's Catholic Church Family Center for one more week, and then clothing needs will be handled through the St. Francis Thrift Shop. Father Roy said there will be no charge for fire victims. Clothing will be available through the Thrift Shop for three or four months, or until all the needs of the community have been met.

# March 16th Brush Pile Burn Re-ignited To Start Forest Fire

Reprinted from May 24 issue

The May 8th forest fire started from a brush and dirt pile that had been burned seven and a half weeks earlier, according to DNR investigators.

No charges were sought against the owner of the brush pile, Gerald Fagan, 57, of Thendara Rd., because of the "incredibly bizarre set of circumstances" said Crawford County Prosecutor John Huss.

Fagan had burned the brush pile on March 16 with a DNR permit while there was one inch of snow on the ground. The brush pile had apparently burned out within the week and Fagan had checked the pile periodically after that and found no fire left.

Even though it snowed and rained after that date, some of the coals remained beneath the dirt and ashes and were re-ignited by the strong winds nearly seven weeks later on May 8th. DNR investigators believe the forest fire originated from this brush pile.

Here is the entire opinion issued by the Prosecuting Attorney:

The forest fire of May 8, 1990, which commenced at approximately 3:30 o'clock p.m. near Thendara Road in Grayling Township, Crawford County, Michigan and eventually involved over five thousand, four hundred acres of land, the destruction of eighty-one domiciles, one hundred, thirteen outbuildings and twenty-five motor vehicles, boats and all terrain vehicles was caused by an incredibly bizarre set of circumstances which are detailed as follows and leads me to conclude that there was no criminal violation of P.A. 1969, No. 329, being the Prevention And Suppression of Forest Fires Act as found at MCLA 320.21 et. seq.

On May 17, 1990, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Law Enforcement Division, presented my office with a report prepared by CO Bruce Patrick, requesting a warrant for Gerald Landon Fagan of Thendara Road, Grayling, Michigan, charging him with a violation of MCLA 320.25 (b) which provides "a person shall not... set fire, or cause, or procure the setting on fire of any flammable material on or adjacent to Forest Land without taking reasonable precautions, both before and after lighting the fire, and at all times thereafter to prevent escape thereof or leave the fire before it is extinguished."

The 21 page report establishes the following facts:

1. In early March, 1990, the suspect hired a commercial excavator to bulldoze stumps, trees and slash into four separate piles on his property located in a line and easterly of his home as a result of his efforts to clear his property.

2. The suspect sought and was granted a burning permit from the Department of Natural Resources on March 16, 1990, and burned both the first brush pile or the one nearest his home and the second brush pile on that day, there being approximately one inch of snow on the ground at that time.

3. It has been established that the suspect had no intention of burning the third and fourth brush piles, being further East of his home, and had evidenced this intention to neighbors stating that he was going to leave them there for rabbit and other small game cover.

4. That the first brush pile burned and then smoldered for approximately two weeks and the second brush pile immediately to the East burned itself out in two days to one week after being set afire.

5. Visual inspection of the land showed that bulldozer tracks were evident over the entire property and that other than several large oak trees, the property appeared to have been stripped of all brush and slash.

6. On April 16, 1990, the #1 brush pile, or the brush pile nearest the suspect's home, rekindled itself and the suspect sought and received from the Department of Natural Resources, a burning permit that day for a "flaming old brush pile" and states that after allowing it to burn down again, he proceeded to douse it with water.

7. The suspect states that he then checked the second brush pile to the East of the one which had re-kindled itself, and could find no sign of fire, smoke or heat in that pile going so far as to place his hands down inside the brush pile in an effort to determine if there was any indication of smoldering.

8. The suspect then continued to check this pile #2 periodically for any signs of fire, smoke or heat and finding none, continued to pick up his property and hand pile brush on the site of the second brush pile.

9. Interviews with neighbors indicate that there had been no burning on the subject property since the re-kindling incident of April 16, 1990, and that one neighbor was on the day of the fire at the back of his own property where he could plainly see the suspect's property and that immediately prior to 3:30 p.m., there was no one on that property nor was there any sign of smoke or fire. Shortly after 3:30 p.m. this same neighbor observed that two of the brush piles were burning and there was no sign of anyone in the vicinity.

10. That approximately 1:30 p.m., being approximately two hours prior to the start of the fire, a DNR plane had flown over the Thendara Road area and had not noticed any smoke or indication of fire at that time.

## Doodles from the Tall Timber

by Wendall Hoover

Fire! The mere mention of the word can bring sheer terror into a person's heart and mind. Too many people in this area have had a taste of that terrible fright and the tearing anguish that goes with it. We can, and have, helped with money and a sympathetic ear, but the stilling terror cannot be quenched so easily.

Thank heaven we don't give up easily, that there is a resilience which makes many want to start over again, knowing full well that some things lost, will never be replaced. It is a good thing that our ancestors were resilient too, because wildfire has, along with its

aftermath, been with us a very long time in this state.

In the fall of 1871, fires badly damaged Holland and Manistee and then, pushed by very strong westerly winds, coupled with extremely dry conditions, burned across the state into the city of Port Huron. The fire destroyed the major portions of 21 counties in just two days. That fire combined with other fires in the state consumed 14,000 square miles of Michigan forest along with towns, and numerous lives, during 1871. Those fires burned over the equivalent of 24 Crawford Counties.



**UNDERGROUND FIRE**--DNR investigators found charred wood that had smoldered underground since March 16.

11. Interviews with a University of Michigan Fishery Research Crew, neighbors and a Crawford AuSable School bus driver, indicate that with winds blowing out of the South West from fifteen to thirty miles an hour, the fire took less than ten minutes from the time that smoke and fire were spotted in the second brush pile until the flames reached the other brush piles and woods to the North and East of the suspect's property and was out of control.

12. The Department of Natural Resources Fire Investigation Team has determined that the second brush pile was the source of the fire and excavation of that pile revealed that in bulldozing the initial pile together, logs and stumps had been covered partially by sand and dirt. Excavation of those stumps from beneath the ground reveal that there were a number of pieces of charred wood which were extremely hot indicating that in fact the fire had smoldered under ground since March 16, 1990 in much the same way as charcoal is made without trace of flame, smoke or heat despite snow storms of one half inch or more on the 22nd, 25th, and 30th of March and again on several occasions in April. The extremely dry conditions and high winds of May 8, 1990 combined to cause this "charcoal-like" substance to either re-ignite or ignite combustible substances in the vicinity which was the cause of the eventual forest fire which then burned Northeasterly from that spot.

I conclude that Gerald Fagan did take responsible precautions before and after lighting the fire on March 16, 1990 on or adjacent to Forest Land as evidenced by the placing of the brush piles in the middle of a field which had been cut over and bulldozed clear and his procurement of a burning permit even though there was snow on the ground at the time.

The only issue remaining is as to whether the suspect took reasonable precautions at all times thereafter to prevent escape of the fire. In that regard, I conclude that with a time lapse of seven to eight weeks since the permitted burning of the number 2 brush pile (the forest fire's point of origin) combined with the periodic checking of the same, Mr. Fagan had taken such reasonable precautions under the circumstances to leave a reasonable person with the expectation that no fire would occur much less escape from the number 2 brush pile on May 8, 1990.

Accordingly, I would decline the Department of Natural Resources' request for a criminal misdemeanor warrant. My decision would have no impact or effect on any civil liability which Mr. Fagan may have incurred as a result of his conduct between March 16th and May 8, 1990.

Date: May 17, 1990  
John B. Huss  
Prosecuting Attorney

